Bridle

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Bridle

by TheEternal (TheEternal_1)

Summary

Will is finding it hard not to take it personal when Hannibal insists on sleeping on the couch, when it's clearly more comfortable to share the bed. During an argument, he realizes just how much it has been affecting him.

Notes

[Bridle, transitive verb,
1: to put a harness with which a horse is governed on the head of; to put a bridle on
2: to restrain, check, or control with or as if with a bridle]

See the end of the work for more notes

They'd talked about it, discussed it civilly and in length, but Hannibal wouldn't budge on the subject. He insisted on sleeping on the couch, when the bed was roomy enough for two. Insisted on spending half the morning between headaches and stiff joints than sharing that comfortable space, sharing it with *him* . It was beginning to be hard not to take it personally.

And as Will observed the carefully hidden —yet stilted nonetheless— movements of his neck and wrists, when taking the pan out, when clutching for a bowl, and his slow steps towards the fridge, bile clawed up his throat. He swallowed hard, trying to keep the feeling at bay. Clenched jaw, hands wringing the soft book.

A sigh, and back to the paragraph.

He'd read the same sentence fifty times in the last thirty minutes, not processing one bit. Sideways glance to the other man, diligently kneading dough. Them and their afternoon rituals, living-room and kitchen as one same space, indulging in shared silence. Yet it was doing nothing for him, unable to concentrate. Maybe he should sit on the porch, get some fresh air —a tempting idea, he reckoned— but not tempting enough as the waft of Hannibal's baked goods that washed over him. He reveled in it, inhaling the scent, shutting everything down but his lungs. Behind closed eyes he was greeted with an empty bed and the never ending argument sawing his skull.

Before he realized, he'd stood up and was digging into the pockets of his jacket, left on the chair's backrest. This low flying migraine had been gnawing the back of his skull for the better half of the past week, and his growing annoyance was not helping.

The other man's gaze followed him, and after a few seconds of fruitless search he uttered, benignly:

"We've ran out of paracetamol"

The silhouette froze. You could've heard a pin drop.

“Since when?”

“I had the last one this morning”

Dry hacks as he answered nonchalantly, paying more attention to the apples he was dissecting than the conversation.

“And were you planning on telling me or was I supposed to find out when my head is about to split in half?”

“ *W-* ”

“You know what? Fine. I’ll go restock myself”

He snatched the keys aggressively, tucking his wallet in the back pocket with the other hand. He would’ve let it go, he really would have, but then he *had to* follow up, didn’t he? *Had to* say something instead of letting him *go* and be *done with it* .

“Will, don’t do that”

Snap. Head spun so fast he could’ve cracked his neck. Their gazes met, soft browns versus electric blue.

Hannibal tilted his head, as if he was speaking to a toddler, and Will was not in the mood to be treated as such, as if that would calm him down. *Who did he think he was?*

“Leave because you’re irritated”

He remained silent, as he put on his jacket, if he'd gone any harsher for the arms, he would've ripped them off the seams.

"We can talk about what is obviously bothering you, instead of running away."

Rough texture grazing his neck. Palms fitting the phone in. But it didn't fit. Did the phone grow overnight? He tried again, at a different angle, but it wouldn't fit. Again. It doesn't fit. in. the. pocket. How? How is he incapable of lodging the phone in its place? He pushed it forward forcefully and the phone slipped in, but his keys fell out of the other pocket, crashing with it's unique scratch-metal clang and Hannibal kept droning on and on in that surgical neutral tone and all he wanted was an aspirin but apparently nobody was willing to do one thing for him, spare him one struggle today. His brain picked up the last sentence buzzing, hands swatting the humm around his head.

"This is not happening because of a sudden lack of -"

"This wouldn't be fucking happening if you swallowed your fucking pride and slept in the fucking bed!"

He cut through Hannibal's voice like a hot knife. Red and breathless, and immediately slapped with regret. It really slipped off much louder, and much more vulgar than he would've liked to. It stung deep. Reckless. Careless. But still wound up and buzzing, a sudden cold enveloped the room. Fingers reeling from the phantom frostbite. What made him keel over was that it was true, *there would still be painkillers left if...*

Thud.

Click.

The other man had left the knife on the cutting board and shut the gas off. Leftover caramel bubbles sizzled in the air between them.

Both arms extended, leaning heavily on the edge of the counter. One of his cuffed sleeves started sliding down the toned forearm. Head looking down, mop of ashen sand coveting his expression.

Laughing. He was laughing.

He looked up, shaking his head, trying to get rid of the fit of humorless chuckles, “Is that what this is?”

It rang thick in the atmosphere, as if dousing the room in hues of danger.

“I give you my life, in more than one sense, and you jab me with the *only* boundary I have?”

“It’s not a boundary”

He closed the distance menacingly, taking advantage of their height difference to loom over.

“That is not for you to decide”

“No, you see, it is,” a dangerous calm spreading through Will’s chest as the words rolled over, “it is for me to decide because you’re trying to gaslight me out of something we both know has nothing to do with *boundaries* .”

The way Hannibal’s nose scrunched in disgust (*“gaslight”*) was enough to keep him fueled. He didn’t want to filter himself. No more bridling his tongue.

“We don’t fucking have any, you’ve said it yourself. *But if we suddenly do* , unless you want to start apologizing for a whole myriad of tresspasses, *we should leave it here,* ” he took a step closer to the exit. ”it seems you’re not only ***lying*** , or ***misdirecting*** , me but yourself, too.”

Hannibal furrowed his brow, and before he could interject, Will turned away, pulling the locks out.

“Good bye, Hannibal.”

“No."

“What do you mean *‘No’* ? I don’t need your permission to leave”

He ricocheted in the spot, Hannibal had grabbed him, pulling him back on his heels. Surgeon hands, applying pressure to the bone and joint, knowing how to make it uncomfortable enough to desist. But Will was not about to play this game.

“It’s in your ***best interest*** to let go of me, *Hannibal*, right now” He snarled, low and hinging into every syllable, making the warning unmistakably clear.

They sized each other out with a stare. This is what animals do, wait for the other to either fall back or follow through. Both postured, both on equal footing. And just as Will was about to **go off** , not being able to keep his short fuse in check any longer, Hannibal let go. His arm fell back against his side, warmth still seared in.

The other man had stormed out of the room in big strides, out of sight already, when Will hollered, breathing erratically, equal parts bewildered and livid. Trailing behind.

“What the *hell* was that?”

Hannibal’s back muscles visibly tensed and straightened under the white button up, he swung around, stern.

“You wanted to leave, Will? There’s the door, or do you want me to carry you there?”

He raised an eyebrow, as Will was reading his face, letting their attitudes seep into each other.

“Fuck you.” he mumbled under his breath.

And slammed the door shut.

Neither reached out, the least they could do was give each other space and alone time.

Hannibal rested his forearms on the cool tiles of the bathroom wall, forehead too, and huffed out the tension. Unbeknownst to the amount of time he’d spent untangling his thoughts, he went back to his dessert, cooking would help. It always did.

After cleaning up, on his own accord and tempo, he took the time to appreciate the work. Adding or taking decorations, fixing minimal details, everything else forgotten.

Finally, he stored them away, leaving two slices of each presented on the counter as a peace offering. Fingers lingering on the apron’s knot, unraveling with a single pull. The last of the afternoon light poured over the windows, it was getting late. He didn’t want to change, not yet, and he didn’t have the energy, either. Not even to keep baking. He’d never admit it, but he did his best bread under stress, or at least some form of discomfort. Hannibal hoped it was of Will’s taste, or it would end up as fake biscottis, or bread pudding, like last time.

A shaky breath escaped his lips, the possibility of Will not coming back soon finally dawning. In the silence of the room, his ideas sat on the pews. All he could do was wait for the ceiling to come down.

Will had been sitting on the porch, waiting. The dying light hazed his outline, a newfound calm tangible in the swirling air.

The door clicked shut behind him, taking it as his cue. There was no point in meandering.

“I’ll admit I was a jerk, but what happened to you?” his hand wrung around the cuff of his jacket, memory fresh, “You’d never…“ *manhandled me? no, well, yes, but I was unconscious, not that it makes it any better, fuck, but this wasn’t like then, didn’t feel lik-*

“If I scared you, I’m sorry.”

Will rubbed his neck and shifted closer, as if needing to reassure him he wasn’t the slightest bit spooked,

“Hannibal, If I was scared of you, had *ever* been scared of you, we wouldn’t be here now,” vague hand gesturing the house, the sky, the seats they were in, all of it,

“It just was… uncharacteristic”

The other man listened intently, not adding, so he continued.

“A-and I looked into those couches that turn into a bed, for you, so your knees won’t creak in the morn...ing”

The joke dissipated, he had tenderly held Will’s hand between his, throwing him off balance.

“What are you doing?”

Hannibal ducked down to give it a butterfly kiss, before answering.

“Apologizing.”

He cleared his throat, the other man gave him the space to talk.

“I couldn’t share the bed with you because I was afraid you’d think I was expecting something in return. You would have resented me, I couldn’t allow that.”

Lips curling into a minimal smile, the ones born out of relief. Yet it faltered as quickly as it had formed.

“I was doing everything short of begging you to take the bed with me, why piss me off? You just threw wood into the fire by not letting me leave”

“I can’t wholly predict you, you are aware of that, but when I grabbed your arm, I intended the discussion to escalate.”

“It worked, I was close to...” He gazed at his shoes then back at his warm hand, realization dawning across, almost surprised, speaking as the thought formed.

“You wanted me to let off steam, even if that meant nudging me into a physical fight”

Hannibal nodded, still focused on caressing his hand. The hands he would let kill him, and pull him back to life, again, if that’s what Will ever needed.

“Afterwards you’d be tired from the adrenaline high, and with a heavy heart, so you’d avoid or give up the subject all together”

A pang to his chest, Hannibal gave the answer as if reading from a textbook. Had he not factored the aftermath? He'd been so … angry, so frustrated, he wouldn't have hesitated to go dirty. Still, Will felt more comfortable thinking that he wouldn't have injured the other man; that he would've realized what he was doing, and stopped himself. But there was also something else entirely that bothered him about this.

"That was your masterplan? You didn't think I'd take care of you?"

"I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself, Will"

Quiet, Hannibal's voice wasn't as steady as either of them had expected.

"I never said you weren't."

Silence.

"Would you let me?" Will found himself asking, voice raw and hushed to a whisper "If I wanted to take care of you, would you let me?"

His other hand joined the older man's, feeling their weight. Hannibal tugged slightly, avoiding eye contact.

"I mean it"

"I … don't know."

"That's the first time I've heard you say that"

“Life is full of first times” *especially with you* .

Will noticed the moon peeking through the heavy clouds, announcing that night was officially upon them. They’d been sitting in silence, interlaced fingers, for god knows how long. They looked up at the vast grey sky. Thunderstorms for tomorrow, the radio had predicted, but they likely wouldn’t last long before unburdening. The cool wind tasted sweet and metallic, and that seemed proof enough for Hannibal to go back inside. The younger man followed suit.

Will gorged on the plate of goodies he’d left for him with such gusto that a blush crept through his cheeks. He could blame it on the cold outside, if needed. Not that the other man noticed, or cared. The sight made him hungry but he couldn’t stomach the idea of actually having anything. Hannibal was past the point of exhaustion, craving only a soft surface to rest his head in.

Will picked up on it, and frowned as he dragged his feet and blanket over to the couch. It broke his heart.

“You’re unbelievable, do you know that?”

He hovered around Hannibal, as he stretched the sheets over it, even holding a pillow for him.

The other man was so tired he didn’t want to hear what he had to say, but he did anyway. He always would.

“-if not for you, do it for me. I’d sleep better, hell, we’d both sleep better! it’s been proven people are better rested when they are next to someone they love-”

Hannibal froze. Will furrowed his brow, not sure what had made him stop. He backtracked mentally and it was a lightning round of *oh fuck, hold on, wait.*

The other man was still as a corpse, not turning around, an awkward tension growing and swallowing the room whole. Will was having none of it. He knew how Hannibal felt about him, even if they'd never addressed it. It was implied. In every meal and every word and every gesture. Had Hannibal gone all this time through the motions of their new life believing it wasn't reciprocated? Was he that bad at showing otherwise?

"I thought you knew" was all he could utter, feeling younger and younger by the second.

Hannibal wouldn't face him, and Will thought fleetingly that he might have fallen asleep still standing. Hesitant, a hand on his shoulder, turning. Then on his cheeks, cupping. Tilting to take those maroons in, taken back by the glass-like sheen.

"I thought you *knew* ," he whispered again, connected foreheads. Breaths mixing in the gap between their bodies.

Hannibal moved slow, painfully slow, closing the distance, and Will received him with parted lips. He could taste the sugar of his own cooking, the irish coffee he'd bought himself while out, and he could feel his overgrown curls between his fingers, soft like fur from too much conditioner. It was short, and sweet, and chaste. Filling, if anything else had to be said. Will felt like he had been shaped to fit him perfectly, two jigsaw pieces from different boxes. His warm head on the crook of his neck, body entirely pressed, relaxed. Outside, it rained and thundered, lulling them further and further into peace. The feeling was foreign to both of them.

True peace.

Will had been afraid to wake up and find the day before to be a fever dream. He'd woken up repeatedly during the night, refusing to open his eyes. But when he finally did, he saw Hannibal, sheets pooled around his armpits, reading a book by the faint morning light. *Real*. It'd been all real.

He turned towards the stirring, the sight that met him knocked the air out of his lungs. Will, smiling faintly, but like never before, with his hair sticking everywhere, bleary eyed.

“Good morning” he croaked, meeting his gaze.

And Hannibal had to bridle himself from rolling over and kissing him, *his Will* , senseless.

End Notes

Hope you liked it! Feedback is encouraged <3

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